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ABSTRACT

Given the need for business people with specialized language skills, this paper first reviews the adequacy of American language classrooms for teaching technical and business French and then reports on one French organization as a resource for educators. L'Institut National de la Jeunesse et de l'Education Populaire (INJEP) promotes the discovery of French culture, including scientific and technical culture, that educators should learn about. INJEP meets two social needs by promoting seminars on teaching methods to French educators and by promoting a knowledge of French culture to foreigners. As part of the second initiative, INJEP regularly offers an international program on scientific, technical, and business-related French culture. Activities of the Culture Scientifique, Technique et Industrielle are described. Contains 14 references. (LB)

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**The INJEP Experience:
New Ideas for Technical and Business French Educators**

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The INJEP Experience: New Ideas for Technical and Business French Educators

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Little has been published on methodology for effectively teaching technical and business French, yet the need for business people with specialized language skills is pressing. In an era when globalization of business opportunity is exploding, the demands on language educators are also rapidly increasing. It's not sufficient to equip technical and business French students with specialized terms and letter writing skills — to be qualified candidates in today's job market they also need a solid background in business protocol differences, key French industries and market knowledge. According to the Wall Street Journal, one of the biggest problems that small firms face in expanding internationally is finding a supply of candidates with sufficient knowledge of foreign markets.¹ This is especially important in light of a recent study correlating 60.5 percent of 17.0 million net new jobs created in the U.S. to small firms.²

Patricia W. Cummins of Northern Arizona University recently conducted a survey of 195 university-based subscribers to *French for Business and International Trade*. She received 90 responses and determined the following:³

- Business French is taught separately (that is, separately from language, literature, culture, conversation) in two-thirds of the responding institutions
- Business French is usually taught at the third- or fourth-year level
- Fifty-one schools offer only one semester of business French
- Only 14 of the professors surveyed offer a second year of study in business French

- For those business French courses which are a part of a program, these university areas are the most common to house them:
 - Economics or French departments
 - International relations
 - Business French specialization within the French major
- Most business French courses are patterned to prepare students for the C.C.I.P. (Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Paris) exams

We can conclude from the results of Cummins' study that the majority of universities having business French components offer little depth in the field. While the scope of most technical and business French programs may be too limited to promote extensive industry and market knowledge, certain steps can be taken to increase the value of the courses or components offered. First, whether language instructors like it or not, students need to come up to speed in basic business terms.⁴ Second, while many manuals are available for teaching technical and business French, all become quickly outdated and should be supported by articles from current French business periodicals.⁵ One instructor suggests that without back-up of current periodical information, the rote formulas and technical vocabulary of a business French class have little practical relevance for students and are therefore superficial.⁶ Further, French periodicals offer insight into business relationships which don't exist in the US, such as the concept of "rente viagère," or life annuities.⁷

The resources of the American language classroom are limited in their ability to prepare students for "the real world," particularly as many French instructors have little to no private sector experience.⁸ One way that many institutions approach this deficit is to send their business French instructors to seminars, either domestically or abroad.⁹ In France, the stages of the C.C.I.P. and CAVILAM (Centre audio-visuel de langues modernes) de Vichy, which offer summer conferences to teachers of French as a foreign language have developed excellent reputations; yet, the costs associated with both programs may keep many instructors from participating.

There is an organization in France; however, devoted to promoting discovery about French culture, including scientific and technical culture, that educators should become aware of, L'Institut National de la Jeunesse et de l'Education Populaire, or INJEP. INJEP was created shortly after WWII by the French government to meet two social needs: To provide seminars on teaching methods to French educators and to promote a knowledge of French culture to foreigners. As a part of this second initiative, INJEP regularly offers an international program on scientific, technical and business-related French

culture. The program, *Culture Scientifique, Technique et Industrielle*, is a valuable resource for the American educator seeking to develop or ameliorate a course in this vital field.

Several factors make participation in *Culture Scientifique, Technique et Industrielle* unique. First, the program attracts participation from a broad range of professions, including education, industrial engineering and other disciplines relating to the development of technical knowledge and its distribution. It is primarily open to professionals, yet students who meet application criteria are also admitted. Second, room, board and activity fees for the 10-day program are roughly \$540, making it attractive even to those educators whose professional budgets don't include seminar allowances. Third, and most importantly, the program provides a wealth of information to technical and business French educators that can be incorporated into a curriculum.

Culture Scientifique, Technique et Industrielle is significant because it touches the pulse of current issues in French business, science and technology. The 1990 program began with a visit of the Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire, C.E.R.N., a European laboratory devoted to nuclear physics situated on the franco-swiss border. Participants had an opportunity to discuss current discoveries in nuclear physics and the field of semi-conductor technology with research scientists on site. We also were some of the first visitors to the *Microcosm*, C.E.R.N.'s public exposition hall, created through the intense public interest in the laboratory which employs 3,000 scientists, technicians, administrators and workers. In addition, attendees had the special privilege (thanks to the organizer's contacts) of walking into one of the three particle accelerator fields in C.E.R.N.'s underground facility. Imagine, if you will, the first-hand understanding this would bring to a technical French instructor's lesson on nuclear technologies!

Another conference highlight was the tour of Gerland, a high-tech research community in Lyon. Starting with a powerful redesign of Tony Garnier's landmark 1909 slaughterhouse into a state-of-the-art exposition hall, developers have engineered a remarkable setting for bio-tech industry and its related needs. One of Gerland's most noteworthy points of interest is the French Ecole Normale Supérieure, a prestigious French graduate school offering specialization in chemistry, physics, biology, geology, mathematics and computer science. The school, which used to be located in Paris, serves 1,200 students and researchers. In addition to the Ecole Normale Supérieure, Gerland is home to 80 companies employing 3,000 people in bio-tech research and

technology transfer. Modern apartments are also a part of the Gerland park. Because of the importance of chemical and bio-tech industries in France's economy, this visit provided participants with a wealth of documentation that could be used in the classroom setting.

Also in Lyon, attendees were invited to Télemco Rhône-Alpes, a subsidiary of France Télécom. The company serves France's Minitel industry, providing networking hardware and programs which allow Minitel terminals to be integrated into office systems. The visit was sponsored by the company's dynamic directeur-général; participants could ask extensive questions about the Minitel and surrounding service industries. Truly, the Minitel is a uniquely-successful French technology, an important inclusion in the technical and business French curriculum.

The Raffinerie de Feyzin, an ELF-Aquitaine refinery, was another stop on the group's agenda. The refinery has an annual capacity for treating 6 million tons of crude oil. Their production spans from gasoline to heavy-duty fuels used in industrial settings. Visitors were hosted by one of the company's engineers, who presented an excellent overview of the facility's capabilities and who commented on many of the current issues facing the industry as France begins regulating the lead content of gasoline. The personal interaction which the group enjoyed with high-level executives, administrators and politicians such as the engineer at Feyzin served as a valuable uniqueness of the program. Each of the visits brought members of the stage in touch with people who are in technical and industrial settings, who deal with the very issues that we are trying to communicate to business and technical French students in the U.S. Particularly for language teachers who lack private industry experience, this added component of the program is invaluable.

L'Archimium, the dream of the Sénateur-Maire de St. Fons, a *commune* of Lyon, was our last stop in France's second most important industrial city. The group was invited by the Sénateur, a visible French politician, for a roundtable discussion on the need for an expo-hall type facility to educate the public on the chemical industry. He proposed such a project, l'Archimium, to the French government at a cost of 30 million French francs; opponents to his plan call it wasteful, given the recent construction of Paris' la Villette — la Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie.

Members of the *Culture Scientifique, Technique et Industrielle* had a chance to compare the two for themselves. A highlight of the second week in the program, which took place in Paris, was la Villette. La Villette is a breathtaking testament to the possibilities of open space in a museum. As the

Hall Tony Garnier at Gerland, la Villette was also a slaughterhouse originally. It is currently a sprawling architectural wonder with 34 permanent exhibits on scientific and technical subjects, as well as cleverly-produced temporary expositions. The four-level Villette boasts conference facilities, an inventorium, multi-media libraries and support services for scientific clubs in addition to its role as a living museum. A planetarium-style theater, the Géode, is found on the parc de la Villette side of the facility.

Our program's participants had the good fortune of a roundtable session with exposition organizers from la Villette, who openly shared their concerns about measuring la Villette's success and discussed drawbacks to the facility, including filling so much space and keeping companies who sponsored exhibits from turning them into advertising opportunities. The level of candor expressed by the officials we met with surprised me, it was exciting to be privy to the viewpoints of the museum's coordinators firsthand.

Indeed, these illustrations are but examples of the uniqueness of the *Culture Scientifique, Technique et Industrielle* experience. Educators who attend the program benefit from developing significant knowledge and contacts within the French scientific and technical community. Through the numerous site visits, participants collect written documentation that can be used as a current basis for classroom exercises and translations. Presentations by key executives and roundtable discussions with members of public and private sectors make *Culture Scientifique, Technique et Industrielle* an excellent springboard for developing technical and business French courses within the university setting.

Notes

¹ Michael Selz, "For Many Small Firms, Going Abroad Is No Vacation," *Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 27, 1992, p. B2.

² Kirchhoff and Phillips, "The Effect of Firm Formation and Growth on Job Creation In the United States," *Journal of Business Venturing*, 3, 1988, p. 261.

³ Patricia W. Cummins, "L'Enseignement du français des affaires aux Etats-Unis," *Français dans le Monde*, May-June 1989, pp. 41-2.

⁴ Colette V. Michael, "L'Enseignement du français commercial et ses problèmes," *French Review*, Oct. 1981, p. 17.

⁵ Michael, p. 20.

⁶ Charles Elkabas, "Quel avenir pour l'enseignement du français commercial au Canada?" *Canadian Modern Language Review*, Jan. 1987, p. 283.

⁷ Michael, p. 20.

⁸ Cummins, p. 42.

⁹ Cummins, p. 42.

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